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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to identify the nonverbal behaviors predicting hireability, as well as the nonverbal behaviors candidates employ that predict hireability. Subjects were 25 campus recruiters, each of whom was given a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study and three copies of a Likert-type questionnaire on a single communicator style--either openness, friendliness, attentiveness, or preciseness. After completing an interview, recruiters were instructed to indicate on the scale to what extent a candidate displayed certain nonverbal characteristics. Twenty-two variables were used: the four communicator styles, hireability, and 17 nonverbal behaviors. Results indicated that to be perceived as hireable, a candidate should (1) use good posture, (2) nod head to indicate attentiveness, (3) lean toward the interviewer, (4) enunciate clearly, (5) have good facial expression, (6) maintain good eye contact, (7) be neatly groomed, (8) talk with an animated style, (9) use hand gestures, (10) have vocal variety, and (11) avoid fidgeting. Another finding was that coordinated clothing was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being considered hireable. It was also noted that candidates could be perceived as facially expressive, smiling, and friendly without being considered hireable. Finally, the style dimension of openness and the nonverbal behaviors associated with it were found to be strong predictors of hireability. (A sample cover letter and test instruments are appended.) (HOD)

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Nonverbal Behaviors Within Communicator Style As Possible Predictors of Hireability In Employment Interviews

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1983

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At the culmination of a university degree program, graduates hope to make their investment of training and effort come to fruition through an employment interview lasting only a matter of minutes. Being one of many applicants with equally acceptable credentials, the applicant must in some way communicate superior hireability. Within the framework of communicator style established by Norton (1978), research indicates that interviewees who are perceived as communicating in an attentive, friendly, precise, and open style are rated most hireable by professional interviewers (Norton and Robinson, 1980). He (1977) defines communicator style as the way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, filtered, or understood.

Norton analyzes interviewee style in terms of ten independent variables: impression leaving, contentious/argumentative, open, dramatic, dominant, precise, relaxed, friendly, attentive, animated/lively, and one dependent variable, hireability. Norton observed that the candidates that were most likely to he hired were perceived as being better communicators, left a strong impression, and were viewed as significantly more attentive, friendly, precise, open, relaxed, not evasive, lively/animated, and serious. The best group of most hireable candidates differentiated from the second best group in terms of being perceived as more attentive, precise, friendly, and open.

Nonverbal behavior may be defined as specific actions and paralinguistics (Mehrabian, 1972). Specific actions encompass facial expressions, hand and arm gestures, posture, movements of the body, and interpersonal distance. Paralinguistics include speech rate and duration, pauses, frequency, vocal loudness, and intensity.

Nonverbal behavior as an influence on hireability has been studied (Imada and Hakel, 1977; McGovern and Tinsley, 1978); however, which specific behaviors lead to hireability has received little attention in communication research.

Studies have reported that interviewers are influenced by subtle and implicit cues of nonverbal communication (Washburn and Hakel, 1973; Wexley, Fugita and Malone, 1975). Research done by Fugita, Wexley and Hillery (1974) and a following study by Wexel, Fugita and Malone (1975) examined the influence of nonverbal behavior during employment interviews. McGovern (1976) and McGovern and Tinsley (1978) also reported this phenomenon and indicated that nonverbal behavior had a significant effect on almost every rating made by personnel representatives observing video tapes of employment interviews. Results of Imada and Hakel's (1977) work showed that nonverbal communication had a significant effect on interviewers' impressions and subsequent decisions.

One purpose of this study is to use the four style variables (friendliness, openness, preciseness, and attentiveness) to discover which nonverbal behaviors act as predictors for hireability (Norton and Robinson, 1980).

Also, each year literature is published and interviews conducted on the subject of how to act during, and dress for a successful job interview (Angel, 1980; Molloy, 1975; Stonat and Reardon, 1977; Rogers, 1982; and Robertson, 1978). "If you're a good persuader, you probably will use slow, easy gestures; a resonant, inflective voice, with a ring of optimism; an uplifted chin; composed hands; you will keep your head on an even plane with the interviewer and maintain good face-to-face eye contact and slow, regular breathing" (Robertson, 1978, p. 74). Thus, our second purpose in conducting this study is to discover which nonverbal behaviors a candidate employs that act as predictors of hireability.

Method

Subjects

Twenty-five recruiters representing diverse organizations such as defense contractors, data processing firms, and businesses were the respondents. Targets were students seeking jobs through the placement service at a large midwestern university.

Procedure

Upon arrival on campus, each interviewer/recruiter was given an orientation packet by the placement service. Into each of 120 packets a cover letter was inserted explaining the purpose of the study, and three copies of a Likert-style questionnaire. Each of the three questionnaires in a packet were identical and concerned only one communicator style of either openness, friendliness, attentiveness, or preciseness (see Appendix).

The instructions state:

> After completion of the interview, please indicate on a scale of 1 to 7 below to what extent the candidate did or did not display the following characteristics in terms of _____. Circle the number that clarifies your choice.

The blank space contained one of the four communicator style variables. Completed questionnaires were given to the placement service receptionist and were collected once every two days. Three hundred and sixty measures were distributed. Of the 81 questionnaires that were returned, 75 of them were complete.

Measure

Twenty-two variables are used in this study: the four communicator styles, hireability, and seventeen nonverbal variables. The four communicator styles, indicating significance to hireability, and the hireability variable are taken from a previous study (Norton and Robinson, 1980). The seventeen nonverbal variables are generated from lists of nonverbal behaviors significant in job-placement interview situations under experimental conditions (Imada and Hakel, 1977; McGovern and Tinsley, 1978). Nonverbal variables are selected for each communicator style based on the researchers' perceptions of which behaviors best described on a particular communicator style. Certain nonverbals, intuitively, seem to fit better under one or two of the communicator styles rather than under all four.

Four variables common across all four styles are hireability, eye contact, nodding head, and crossing legs. A greater frequency of eye-contact might indicate more attentiveness, friendliness, a willingness to be open, and a desire to be precise; also,

crossing legs might indicate relaxation, and give the impression of a person who is attentive, friendly, open, yet precise in mannerisms.

Three variables common to friendliness, openness, and attentiveness are erectness of posture, lean of the body, and positioning of the body in relation to the interviewer. Attentiveness, friendliness, and openness might be indicated by a candidate positioning herself near the interviewer, and leaning toward the interviewer while listening.

Two variables common to friendliness, openness, and preciseness are speech rate and vocal variety. A friendly, open person might vary both speech rate and the variety of pitch, stress, and amplitude in speaking; also, a precise person might carefully choose how he speaks.

Smiling and touching the interviewer are included under friendliness and openness. An open, friendly person might feel free to touch the interviewer, and might smile more.

Facial expression is included under friendliness and attentiveness. Hand gestures are included under friendliness and preciseness. A precise person might discriminately choose which gestures to use, while a friendly person might be animated and use more gestures.

Fidgetiness is included under openness and attentiveness. A candidate might be less inclined to fidget if she is attentive to the interviewer. Other nonverbals are placed in categories in a similar, intuitive fashion.

Variables which appear in conjunction with only one communicator style are enunciation, vocal loudness, coordination of clothing, and grooming under preciseness; handshake is placed under friendliness.

As one purpose of this study is to determine which nonverbal behaviors predict hireability, hireability is the dependent variable.

Results

Several analyses were performed within and between each style dimension. In order to look at the central tendency differences between low and high hireability, a one way analysis of variance was employed. For this analysis, candidates who were ranked 1, 2, 3 or 4 on the hireability dimension were coded as "low" in hireability, and those who were ranked 5, 6 or 7 were coded as "high" in hireability. This decision was made by examining the frequencies of all 23 variables, and considering potential cell sizes and frequency distributions for differing splits.

The one way analysis of variance revealed that under attentiveness; eye contact, nodding of the head and facial expression were found to have significance in relation to hireability. Attentiveness, as a variable, was also found to be significant (see Table 1).

Under openness; eye contact, nodding of the head, erectness of posture, lean of the body, positioning of the body, smiling and vocal variety were found to have significance in relation to hireability. Openness was also found to be significant.

Table 1

Means and F-Statistics of Style Variables and Nonverbal Behaviors as Related to Hireability

Style Variables & Nonverbals	Means		F Statistic	F Probability
	Low Hireability	High Hireability		
Attentive	5.5	6.4	5.7	.03
Eye Contact	4.4	6.1	15.2	.00
Nodded Head	2.8	4.4	10.0	.00
Facially Expressive	3.0	5.6	17.7	.00
Friendliness	4.8	6.1	3.4	.10 n.s.
Eye Contact	4.4	6.3	15.6	.00
Positioned Self as close as possible	3.2	4.4	5.2	.05
Facially Expressive	4.0	5.6	4.6	.05
Spoke Quickly	4.0	5.1	7.8	.02
Vocal Variety	3.6	4.9	4.6	.05
Openness	2.5	5.9	29.6	.00
Eye Contact	3.2	6.3	44.9	.00
Nodded Head	3.5	5.7	9.1	.01
Erect Posture	4.5	6.1	7.0	.02
Leaned Forward	4.0	5.7	10.7	.00
Positioned Self as close as possible	3.7	5.7	12.5	.00
Preciseness	3.8	5.4	5.6	.03
Eye Contact	3.7	6.5	30.8	.00
Vocal Variety	4.2	5.3	8.6	.00
Hand Gestures	2.9	4.6	7.4	.02
Enunciated Clearly	4.6	6.5	15.7	.00
Neatly Groomed	5.1	6.5	7.4	.02

Under preciseness; eye contact, vocal variety, hand gestures and enunciation were found to have significance in relation to hireability. Preciseness as a variable was also found to be significant.

Under friendliness; eye contact, the position of the body, speech rate, vocal variety and strength of handshake were found to have significance in relation to hireability. Friendliness was the only variable found not to be significant in relation to hireability.

The reliability coefficients for the variables within each of the four style variables are as follows: Attentive, $\alpha = .77$; Friendly, $\alpha = .86$; Open, $\alpha = .91$; and Precise, $\alpha = .85$.

A Pearson correlation was performed to determine relationships between the variables. Smallest space analysis (Lingoes, 1973) was used to visually represent the clustering of the variables. Tests of reliability were performed on the variables within each of the four style dimensions, as well as discriminant analyses to reveal nonverbal discriminators of hireability.

A matrix of correlation coefficients was generated from a Pearson Correlation. These coefficients were used to construct a correlagram (Figure 1), and smallest space analyses (Figures 2 to 5). The correlagram illustrates the relationships between variables with correlations greater than .70, irrespective of style dimension. Each smallest space analysis was performed within each of the four style dimensions in order to examine potential style-related differences among the variables.

FIGURE 1

Correlagram of Nonverbal Variables and Hireability

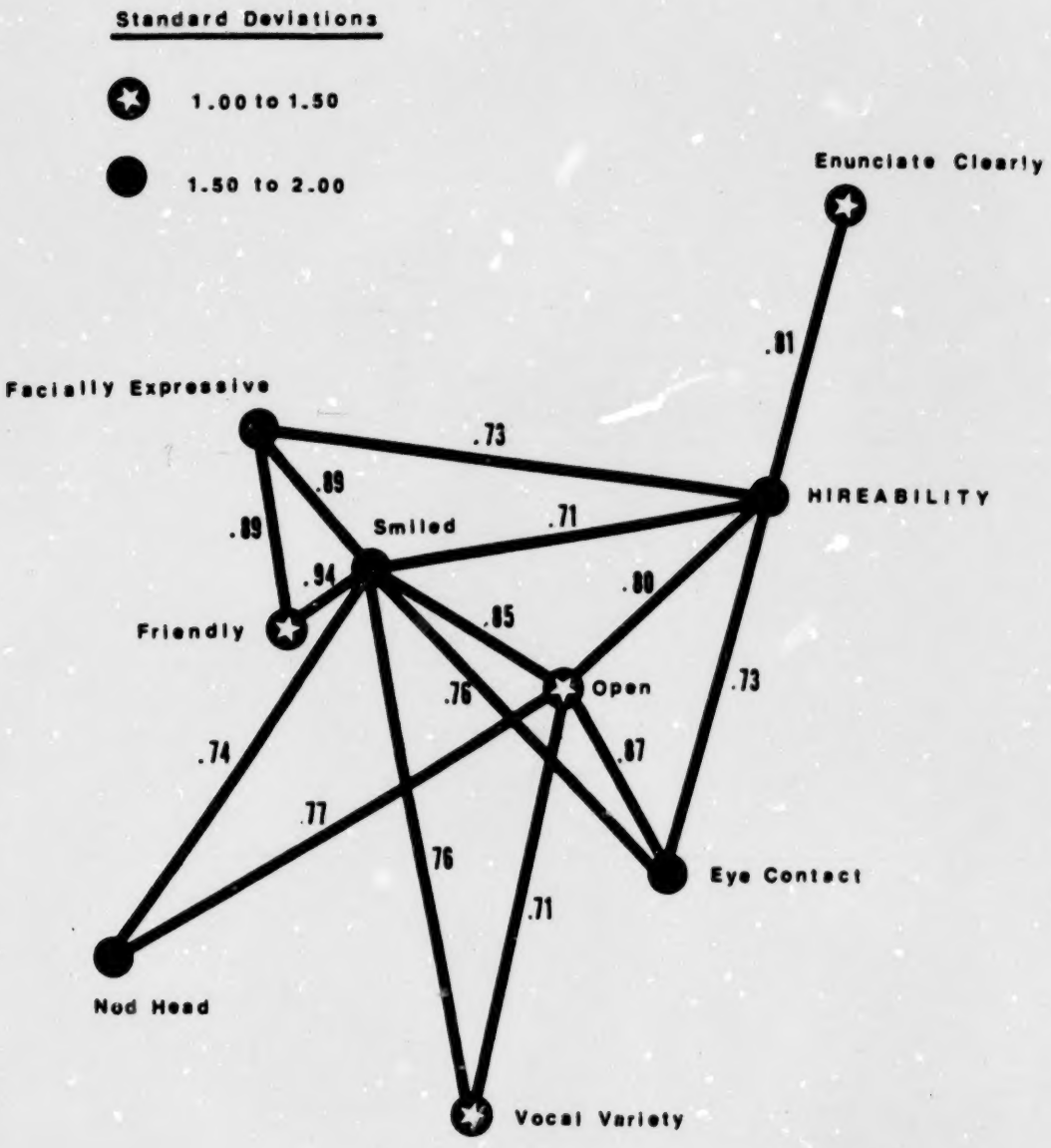


FIGURE 2

Smallest space matrix plotting the Attentive style dimension, and nonverbal and paraverbal behaviors in relation to hireability.

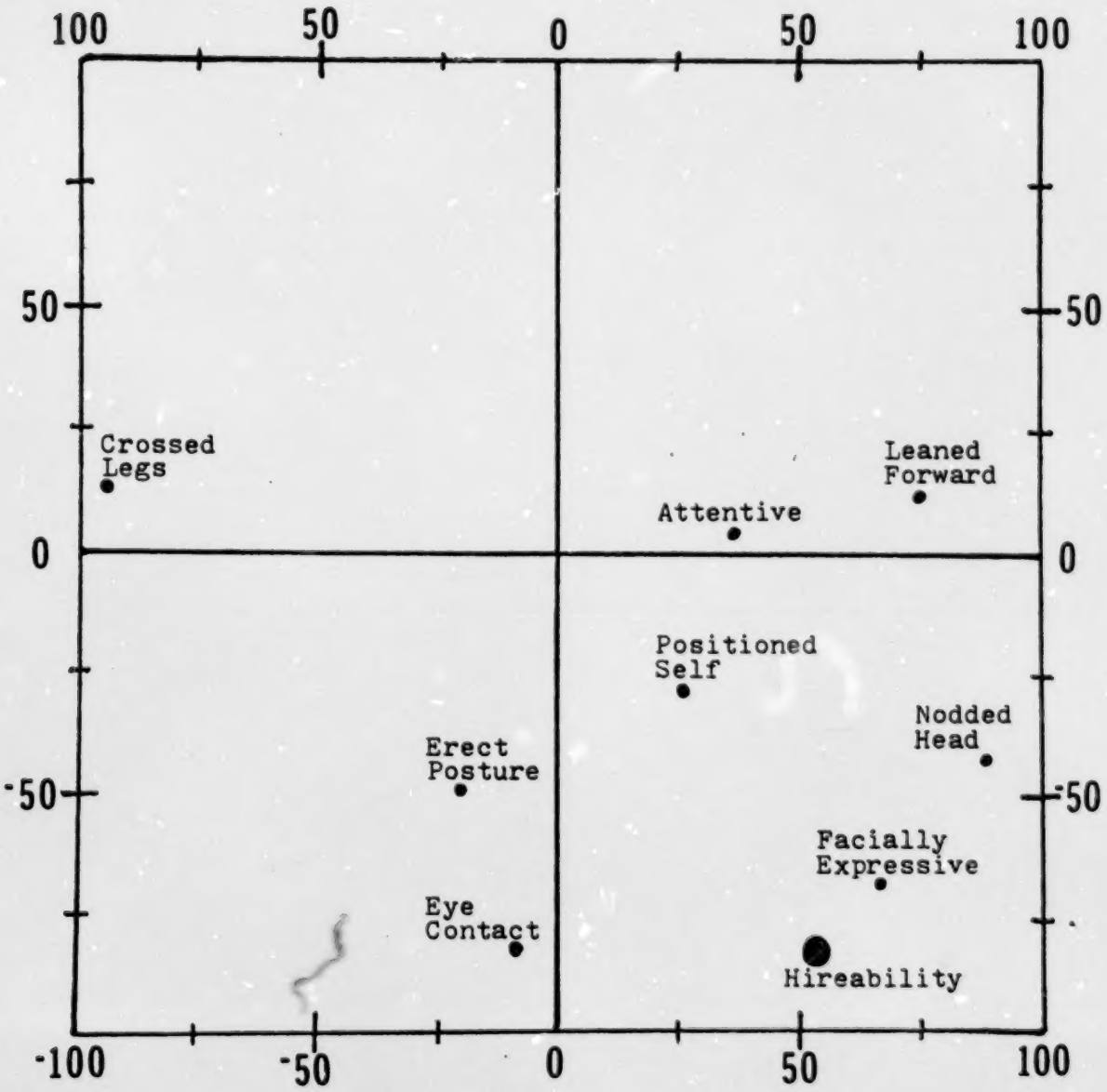


FIGURE 3

Smallest space matrix plotting the Friendly style dimension, and nonverbal and paraverbal behaviors in relation to hireability.

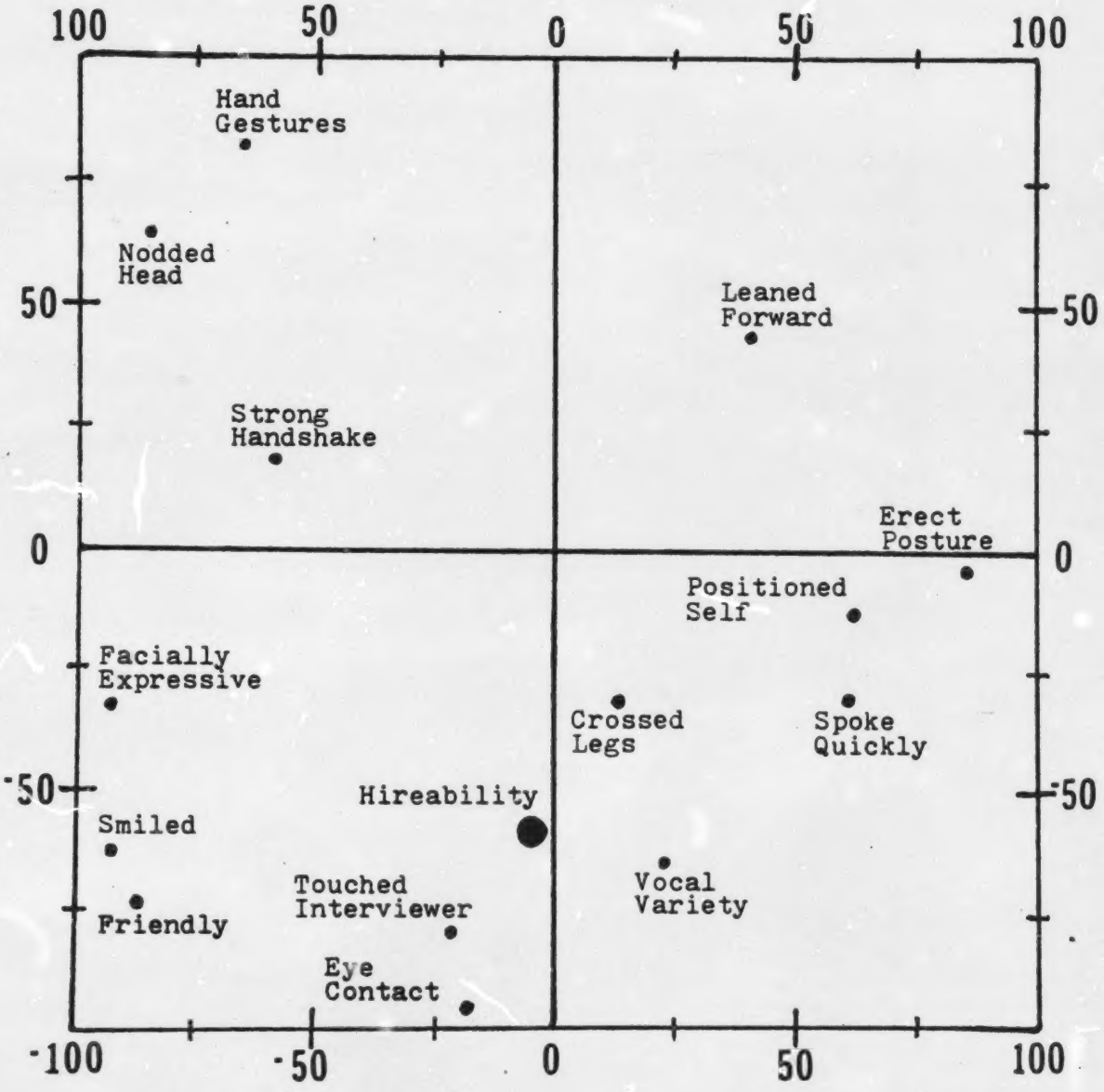


FIGURE 4

Smallest space matrix plotting the Open style dimension, and nonverbal and paraverbal behaviors in relation to hireability.

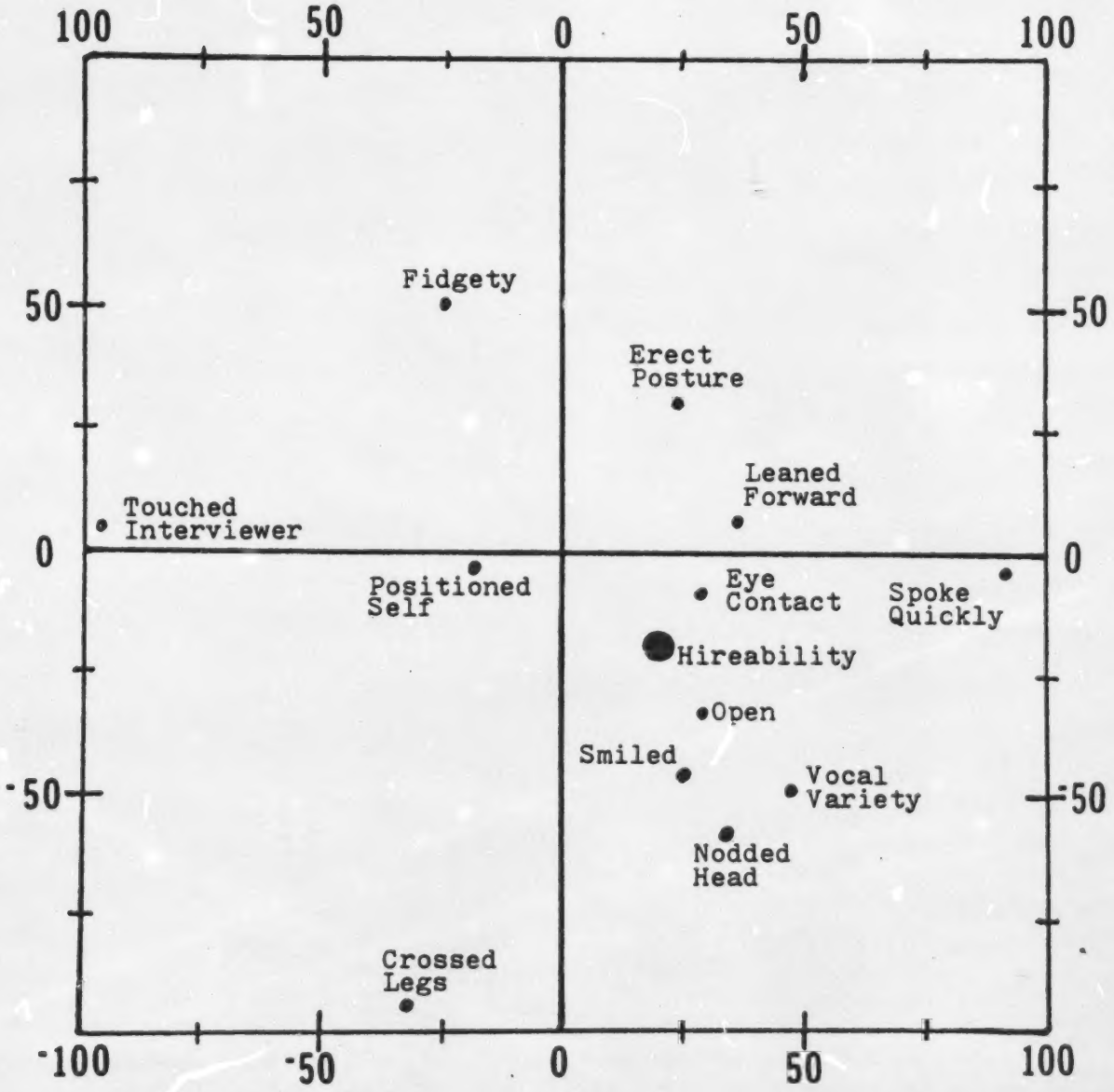
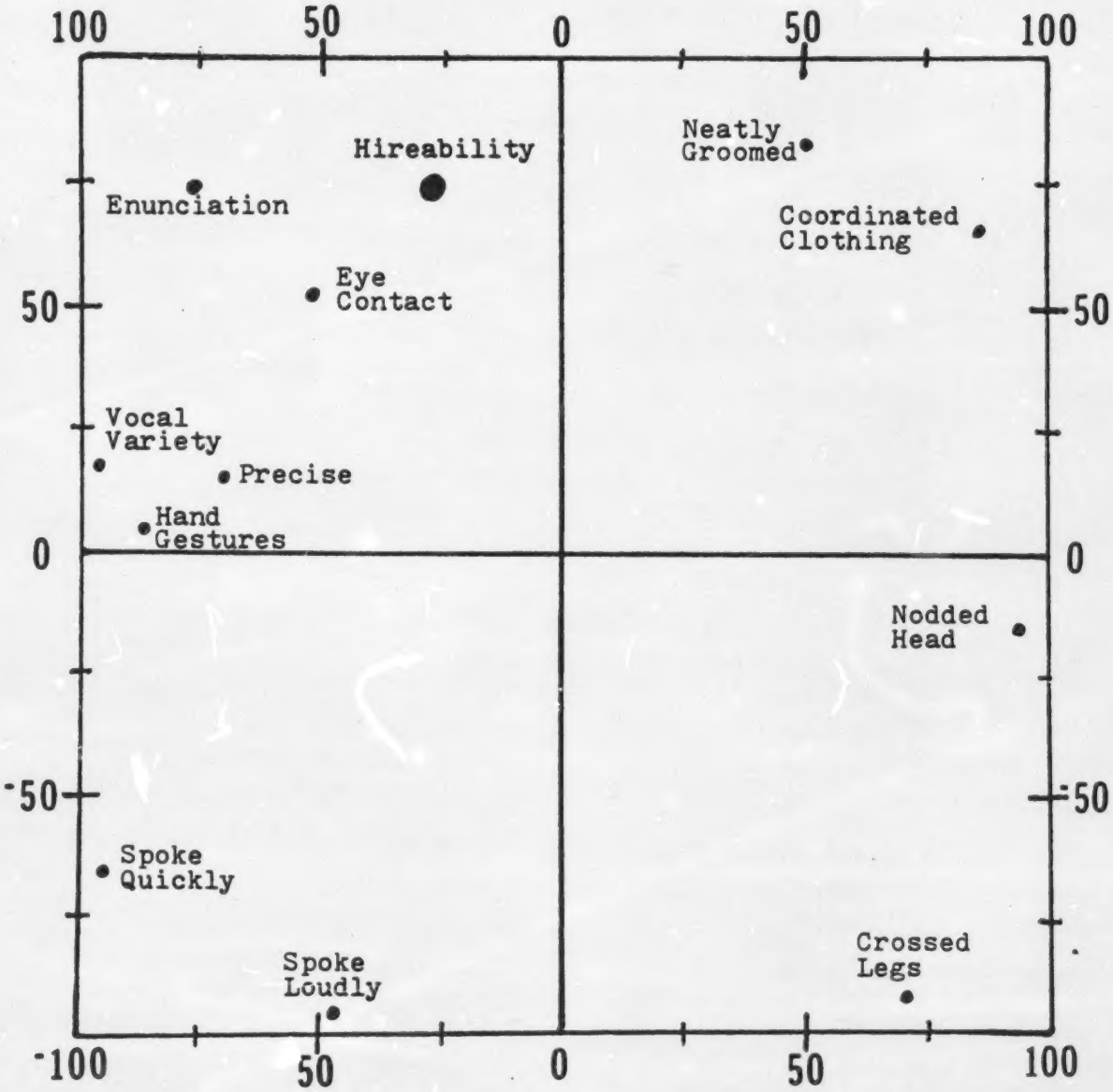


FIGURE 5

Smallest space matrix plotting the Precise style dimension, and nonverbal and paraverbal behaviors in relation to hireability.



Under attentiveness, variables which were most highly correlated with hireability were facially expressive (r = .81), nodded head (r = .67), and the maintenance of eye contact (r = .56). This is illustrated in Figure 2.

Under friendliness, the variables most highly correlated with hireability were vocal variety (r = .86), spoke quickly (r = .78), maintenance of eye contact (r = .76), positioned self closely (r = .75), strong handshake (r = .70), erect posture (r = .60), friendliness (r = .59), facially expressive (r = .57) and smiled frequently (r = .57) (see Figure 3).

Under openness, the variables most highly correlated with hireability were maintenance of eye contact (r = .84), smiled frequently (r = .80), openness (r = .80), leaned forward (r = .74), vocal variety (r = .67), positioned self closely (r = .65), nodded head often (r = .64) and erect posture (4 = .62) (see Figure 4).

Under preciseness, the variables most highly correlated with hireability were enunciated clearly (r = .81), maintenance of eye contact (r = .79), preciseness (r = .69) and vocal variety (r = .55) (see Figure 5).

As can be seen from Figures 2 through 5, nonverbal variables are clustered differently across each of the four dimensions. Openness contains the most highly correlated clusters. Friendliness generates fewer clusters, followed by preciseness. Attentiveness generates the most scattered distribution of variables.

In order to further explore the data and look for unexpected relationships between the variables, exploratory data analysis

was used. A box and whiskers schematic plot (Tukey, 1979) was constructed from the correlation coefficients of the six common variables across openness, friendliness, and attentiveness. Figure 6 illustrates the correlations of these six common variables (eye contact, nodding head, crossed legs, erect posture, leaned forward, and positioned self) with each other.

It is evident that variables tend to be less correlated with each other in moving from openness to friendliness to attentiveness. Variables are more closely correlated with each other in the openness style dimension than in the other two style dimensions. Fifty percent of the highest correlations in openness exceed seventy-five percent of the total correlations in friendliness and virtually all of the correlations in attentiveness. Similarly, a second box and whiskers plot was constructed illustrating the correlations between all the nonverbal behaviors with hireability. It can be seen from Figure 7 that a similar pattern of correlations occur as in Figure 6. Openness contains the most highly correlated clusters with hireability. Friendliness generated fewer clusters, followed by attentiveness.

Those variables which are most highly correlated with each other within a certain style dimension seem to be most highly correlated with hireability. Hence, those targets considered to be most hireable were likely to be ranked more consistently across each of six nonverbal variables (eye contact, nodding head, crossing legs, erectness of posture, lean of the the body, and positioning self).

FIGURE 6

Box and Whiskers Analysis Based on
Pearson Correlations of Communicator Style Variables
with Each Other

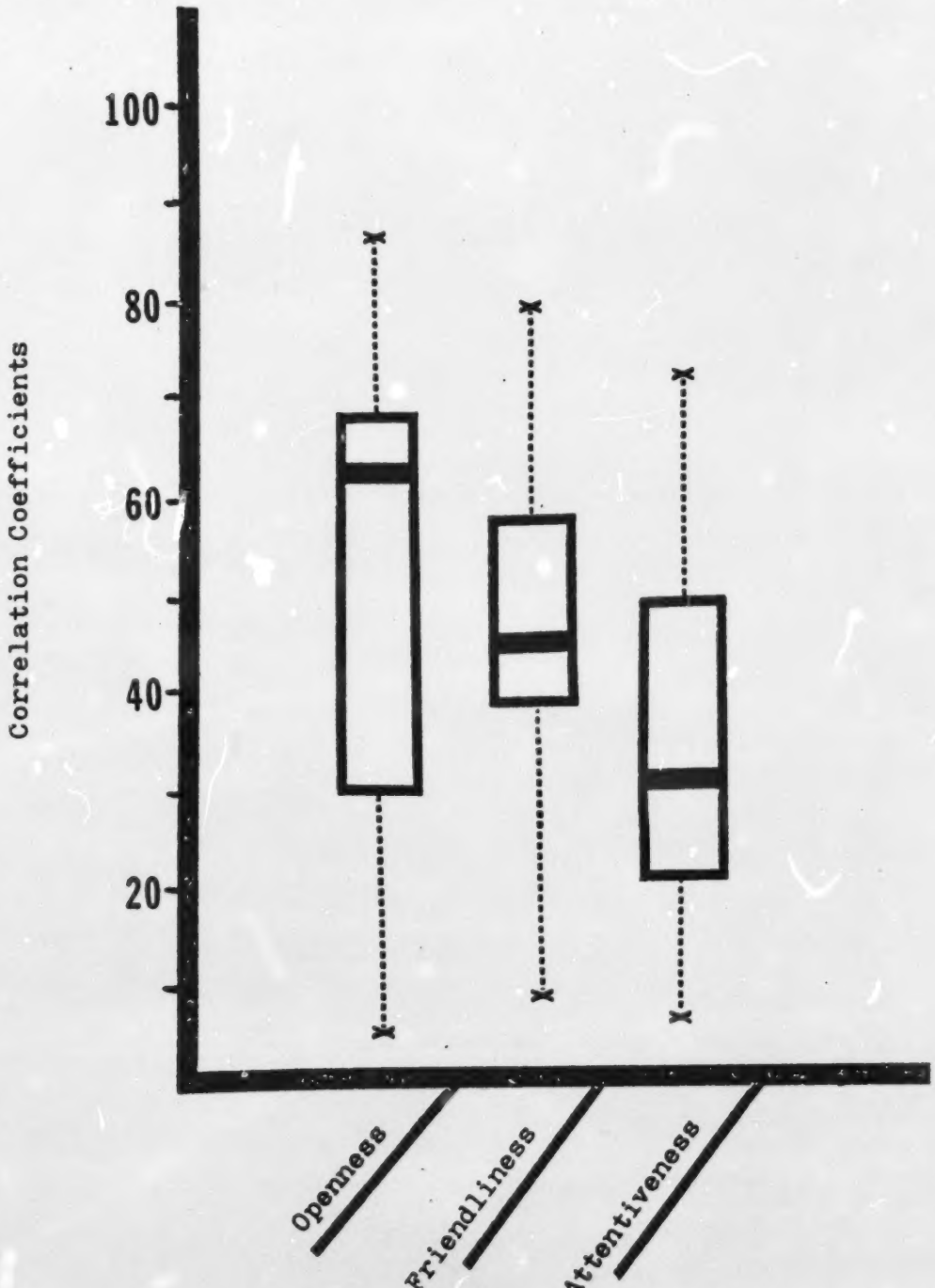
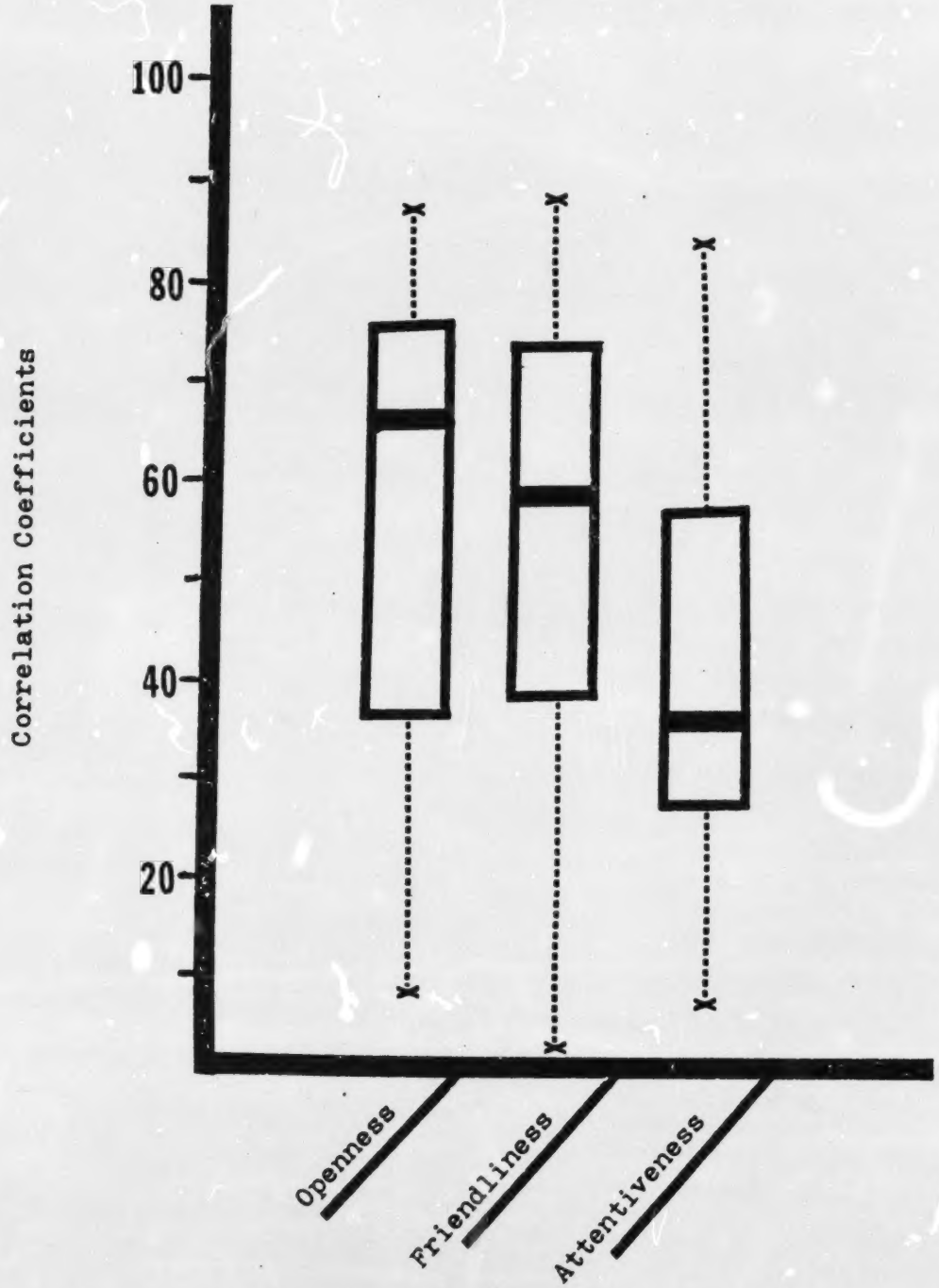


FIGURE 7

Box and Whiskers Analysis Based on
Pearson Correlations of Communicator Style Variables
with Hireability



Since one focus of this study was to discover nonverbal and paraverbal behaviors which distinguished between hireable and unhireable candidates, a discriminant analysis was performed on all 22 independent variables (see Table 2). The resulting discriminant function coefficients from this analysis were used to select the variables which were the strongest discriminators of hireability. Eight variables had coefficients greater than 1.731 and were portioned out for a second analysis. The resulting coefficients from this second analysis were examined for highly discriminating variables (coefficients greater than 1.971); these five variables were used for a third and final discriminant analysis. The resulting five variables (coordinated clothing, 1.23; enunciated clearly, 1.04; eye contact, 1.01; precise, -.98; and neatly groomed, -1.10) compose the discriminant equation used in this analysis (see Table 2). Low hireable candidates (ranked 1 to 4, n = 29) produced an overall mean of 4.61 from this discriminant equation, while high hireable candidates (ranked 5 to 7, n = 46) produced a mean of 6.62).

Discussion

Certain nonverbal behaviors are strong predictors of a candidate's hireability when associated with the four style dimensions: attentiveness, friendliness, openness, and preciseness. This research has verified that certain nonverbal behaviors, which up to now had not been quantitatively tested in a field setting, are used in determining a candidate's hireability.

Table 2

Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficients

Variables	Analysis 1	Analysis 2	Analysis 3
X_1 coordinated clothing	1.67	1.31	1.25
X_2 enunciated clearly	1.44	1.14	1.04
X_3 eye contact	.86	1.00	1.01
X_4 precise	-1.13	- .96	- .98
X_5 neatly groomed	-1.11	-1.07	-1.10
X_6 friendly	- .75	- .55	
X_7 strong handshake	.74	.69	
X_8 facially expressive	.74	.39	
X_9 spoke loudly	- .42		
X_{10} used hand gestures	- .39		
X_{11} spoke quickly	.37		
X_{12} vocal variety	.36		
X_{13} nodded head	.36		
X_{14} erect posture	- .16		
X_{15} crossed legs	.15		
X_{16} attentive	.08		
X_{17} smiled	- .04		
X_{18} positioned self close	- .04		
X_{19} leaned forward	- .02		
X_{20} open	- .01		
X_{21} touched interviewer	.01		
X_{22} fidgety	- .01		

Discriminant Equation:
(Analysis 3)

$$Y_i = (1.23)X_1 + (1.04)X_2 + (1.01)X_3 - (.98)X_4 - (1.10)X_5$$

In order to be perceived as hireable, a candidate should use good posture, nod head to indicate attentiveness, lean toward the interviewer, enunciate clearly, have good facial expression, maintain good eye-contact, be neatly groomed, talk with an animated style, use hand gestures, and have vocal variety. One thing the candidate should not do is fidget. These findings concur with the popular literature (Robertson, 1978).

However, the popular literature does not mention where a candidate should position himself in relation to the interviewer. The findings of our research indicate that an interviewer will perceive a candidate as being open and friendly if he positions himself close to the interviewer.

Coordinated clothing is not highly correlated with hireability ($r = .39$) despite the assertions of popular literature on interviewing techniques (Molloy, 1975). A possible explanation for this is that most of the targets literally dress by the book. Subsequently, this has minimized the impact of this variable by desensitizing the interviewer to this nonverbal cue. Coordinated clothing, however, was the most discriminating variable of hireability for all three discriminant analyses performed. These results imply that coordinated clothing is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for being considered hireable by an interviewer.

Another interesting phenomenon is discovered by examining the smallest space analysis of the friendliness dimension. The friendliness cluster, which consists of facial expression, smiling,

and friendliness, is spatially distant from hireability. Candidates may be perceived as facially expressive, smiling, and friendly without being considered hireable. A possible explanation for this is the absence of a style related variable, that of sincerity. A sincerity variable may link this cluster closer to hireability. In this study, an interviewer could be perceiving these friendliness variables as insincere. For example, a candidate who smiles very often may give the impression of being phony. Candidates should be aware that being too friendly may be perceived negatively by the interviewer.

Finally, the style dimension of openness, and the nonverbal behaviors associated with it, are strong predictors of a candidate's hireability. This strong relationship between openness and hireability replicates the findings of Norton and Robinson (1980).

The Box and Whiskers suggests that consistent ranking of nonverbal and paraverbal behaviors occurs when candidates are perceived as hireable. Once an interviewer has considered a candidate as hireable, he or she may perceptually cluster that candidate's nonverbal behaviors together and view them in a gestalt manner. This may cause the interviewer to project hireable qualities on a candidate once an initial decision of hireability has been made, solidifying their perceptions of the candidate. These findings may be useful to an interviewer, sensitizing him or her to nuances in a candidate's nonverbal behavior which were clouded by an initial projection of hireability.

Suggestions for Future Research

This was an exploratory study; the data collected and conclusions drawn from the results indicate certain relationships which cannot be proved conclusive. Future research should: 1) Study the possibility of a sincerity dimension affecting friendliness; 2) Place the significant nonverbal behaviors under all style dimensions in order to measure possible relationships between those variables and hireability; 3) Explore the clustering of nonverbal behaviors for candidates who are considered hireable; and 4) Involve more field research in this area to establish results which are more generalizable to actual interview situations.

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Appendix

PURDUE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

November 1, 1982

Dear Campus Interviewer,

Thank you for coming to Purdue to conduct employment interviews. The large number of interviews conducted on this campus provide an excellent setting for communication research.

Previous studies within this setting indicate a relationship between a candidate's hireability and their style of communication. We would like your help in investigating this relationship.

We hope you will choose to participate in this research by completing the enclosed questionnaires and returning them to the receptionist at the University Placement Service. If you choose to participate please fill out one questionnaire for each of three candidates that you will interview today.

All results will be kept confidential. If you wish to receive the results of the study, please complete the enclosed form and return it with the questionnaires.

Thank you for your contribution to our study.

____Yes, please send the results of this study to:

Name_____Address_____

_____City_____State____Zip_____

Heavilon Hall
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907
(317) 49-43429

sex of candidate: Male ___ Female ___

After completion of the interview, please indicate on the scale of 1 to 7 below to what extent the candidate did or did not display the following characteristics in terms of ATTENTIVENESS. Circle the number that clarifies your choice.

not attentive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	attentive
facially non-expressive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	facially expressive
did not maintain eye contact	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	maintained eye contact
slouched in chair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	erect posture
leaned back	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	leaned forward
not fidgety	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	fidgety
nodded head rarely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	nodded head often
did not cross legs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	crossed legs

PLEASE TURN OVER

The candidate positioned self:

as far away as possible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	as close as possible

candidate not hireable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	candidate hireable

Sex of candidate: Male ___ Female ___

After completion of the interview, please indicate on the scale of 1 to 7 below to what extent the candidate did or did not display the following characteristics in terms of FRIENDLINESS. Circle the number that clarifies your choice.

not friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 friendly
did not smile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 frequently smiled
did not maintain eye contact	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 maintained eye contact
slouched in chair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 erect posture
leaned back	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 leaned forward
weak handshake	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 strong handshake
did not touch interviewer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 touched interviewer
spoke slowly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7 spoke quickly

***PLEASE TURN OVER ***

monotone voice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	vocal variety
did not use hand gestures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	used hand gestures
facially non-expressive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	facially expressive
nodded head rarely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	nodded head often
did not cross legs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	crossed legs

The candidate positioned self:

as far away as possible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	as close as possible
candidate not hireable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	candidate hireable

Sex of candidate: Male ___ Female _____

After completion of the interview, please indicate on the scale of 1 to 7 below to what extent the candidate did or did not display the following characteristics in terms of OPENNESS. Circle the number that clarifies your choice.

closed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	open
did not smile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	frequently smiled
did not maintain eye contact	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	maintained eye contact
slouched in chair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	erect posture
did not cross legs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	crossed legs
not fidgety	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	fidgety
nodded head rarely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	nodded head often
did not touch interviewer	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	touched interviewer

PLEASE TURN OVER

monotone voice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	vocal variety
spoke slowly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	spoke quickly
leaned back	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	leaned forward

The candidate positioned self:

as far away as possible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	as close as possible
candidate not hireable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	candidate hireable

Sex of candidate: Male ___ Female ___

After completion of the interview, please indicate on the scale of 1 to 7 below to what extent the candidate did or did not display the following characteristics in terms of PRECISENESS. Circle the number that clarifies your choice.

not precise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	precise
spoke slowly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	spoke quickly
unclear enunciation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	clear enunciation
spoke softly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	spoke loudly
uncoordinated clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	coordinated clothing
not neatly groomed	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	neatly groomed
did not use hand gestures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	used hand gestures
did not maintain eye contact	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	maintained eye contact

PLEASE TURN OVER

monotone voice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	vocal variety
nodded head rarely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	nodded head often
did not cross legs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	crossed legs
candidate not hireable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	candidate hireable